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EXCISE

TELEGRAM

SECRET 723

PAGE 01 SAIGON 12592 01 OF 02 070622Z

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ACTION EA-18

INFO OCT-01 SS-20 NSC-10 NSCE-00 PM-03 INR-07 CIAE-00

NSAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 L-02 AID-12 RSR-01 RSC-01 /076 W
005149

R 070503Z AUG 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8358
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL DANANG

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Dean J. J. J. DATE 1/26/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

SECRET SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 12592

LIMDIS.

CINCPAC FOR POLAD.

SUBJECT: COMMUNIST ELECTION TACTICS: PRELIMINARY
ASSESSMENT

1. SUMMARY: RECENT REPORTS SUGGEST THAT THE COMMUNISTS,
WHILE PRESERVING OTHER OPTIONS, MAY SEEK TO PROMOTE THE
ELECTION PROSPECTS OF SELECTED CANDIDATES FOR LOWER HOUSE
SEATS AND POSSIBLY ALSO OF BIG MINH FOR THE PRESIDENCY.
SUCH EFFORTS WOULD APPEAR DESIGNED TO ASSURE SOME ACCESS
TO THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE AND TO DISCREDIT, IF NOT
PREVENT, A THIEU VICTORY. END SUMMARY.

2. UNTIL RECENTLY MOST REPORTS OF COMMUNIST INTENTIONS
TOWARD THE COMING SOUTH VIETNAMESE LOWER HOUSE AND
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS INDICATED ATTEMPTS WOULD BE MADE TO
DISRUPT THEM WITH COUNTERPROPAGANDA AND TERRORISM.

1 THERE
WAS ALSO AN OCCASIONAL HINT OF A MAJOR ATTACK SOMEWHERE
IN SOUTH VIETNAM TO BE TIMED TO THE CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 02 SAIGON 12592 01 OF 02 070622Z

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OTHER REPORTS, ESPECIALLY HANOI BROADCASTS, REFLECTED THE BASIC COMMUNIST POSITION THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE NECESSARILY A FRAUD, AS WOULD BE ANY SUCH EXERCISE CONDUCTED BY THE US AND "THE PUPPET SAIGON REGIME," AND WOULD CONTINUE TO BE DENOUNCED AS SUCH.

3. MORE RECENTLY INDICATIONS FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES SUGGEST THAT THE COMMUNISTS HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTIONS, GIVING SUPPORT TO LOWER HOUSE CANDIDATES SYMPATHETIC--OR AMENABLE--TO THEIR CAUSE AND POSSIBLY ALSO TO GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH FOR PRESIDENTIAL RACE. ALTHOUGH THIS IS MUCH LESS CERTAIN.

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4. THE LATTER TACTIC ON PARTICIPATION DOES NOT NECESSARILY SUPERSEDE THE EARLIER REPORTED INTENTIONS TO CONDEMN AND DISRUPT THE COMMUNISTS, AS IN THE PAST, WILL PROBABLY TRY A MIXTURE OF TACTICS. THEY MAY ADOPT A CHECKERBOARD APPROACH, SEEKING TO DISRUPT WHERE A PRO-THIEU VOTE IS LIKELY AND PROMOTING OPPOSITION FIGURES WHERE SUCH CANDIDATES MIGHT WIN. THEY COULD ATTEMPT A ONE-TWO PUNCH ON A WIDER BASIS, IN WHICH LOW-SCALE BUT WIDESPREAD HARASSMENT OF THE POPULATION JUST BEFORE THE VOTING WOULD BE DESIGNED TO INDUCE A MOOD FAVORABLE TO "PEACE" CANDIDATES. THUS FORCE MAY BE USED TO INFLUENCE CONTESTS IN SOME PLACES AS WELL AS TO DISRUPT THE VOTING IN OTHERS. THE BIG-ATTACK PREPARATIONS NOTED BY SOME SOURCES MAY BE A RESERVE OPTION FOR USE IF AND WHEN THE GAMBLE SEEMS WORTH IT. THE PROJECTED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN CALLING THE ELECTIONS A HOAX MAY ALSO BE A RESERVE PLAN FOR USE TO DISCREDIT A PRO-THIEU OUTCOME. FOR THE TIME BEING, THE COMMUNISTS CAN NURSE ALONG ALL THESE OPTIONS, CHOOSING THE MOST ADVANTAGEOUS CONSIDERATIONS AS DEVELOPMENTS UNFOLD. IN THE PROCESS THEY WILL HAVE TO ADJUST THEIR PLANS TO THEIR OWN CAPABILITIES AT GIVEN PLACES AND TIMES, CAPABILITIES THAT IN AN OVERALL SENSE ARE LOWER THAN IN PREVIOUS NATIONAL ELECTION PERIODS. MOREOVER, GVN COUNTERMEASURES WILL ALSO AFFECT ENEMY PROSPECTS. CONSEQUENTLY, ENEMY PLANS AT ANY GIVEN TIME SHOULD

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Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 03. SAIGON 12592 01 OF 02 070622Z

PROBABLY BE CONSIDERED TRANSIENT AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

5% QUIET BACKING OF CANDIDATES FOR LOWER HOUSE SEATS IS IN ANY EVENT A FAIRLY OBVIOUS MOVE SINCE THERE NO DOUBT ARE MANY (AMONG THE 1,300-ODD STANDING FOR OFFICE) WHO EITHER ARE SYMPATHETIC TO THE VC OR ARE SUBJECT TO VC INFLUENCE. THE PRESENCE OF A SIZEABLE BLOC OF SUCH INDIVIDUALS IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE WOULD REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT VC ASSET FOR FUTURE POLITICAL ACTION.

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

SECRET 721

PAGE 01 SAIGON 12592 02 OF 02. 070627Z

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ACTION EA-18

INFO: OCT-01 SS-20 NSCE-00 NSC-10 INR-07 CIAE-00 NSAE-00

PM-03 DODE-00 L-02 AID-12 PRS-01 RSR-01 RSC-01 /076 W
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R 070503Z AUG 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 12592.

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6. THE INDICATIONS OF VC/DRV SUPPORT FOR BIG MINH WHILE MUCH MORE TENTATIVE EVOKE SPECIAL INTEREST. THE REASONS FOR THIS EFFECT ARE FROM GVN.

7. THERE IS ENOUGH SMOKE (ESPECIALLY IN COSVN DIRECTIVE 38 AND VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS IN PARIS) TO SUGGEST THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE INDEED BOOSTING MINH. THEY HAVE TAKEN CARE SO FAR NOT TO SUPPORT HIM OPENLY BY NAME. BUT THEIR SPOKESMEN AT THE PARIS TALKS HAVE POINTEDLY REFUSED TO CONDEMN MINH, ALONG WITH THIEU AND KY, AS UNACCEPTABLE. THROUGH OTHER MEANS THEY APPEAR TO BE TOUTING MINH TO US AS THE LEADER WHO COULD LET US OFF THE VIET-NAM HOOK WITH HONOR. THIS TACTIC RUNS CERTAIN AT LEAST HYPOTHETICAL RISKS: (A) COMMUNIST SUPPORT FOR MINH COULD CONSTITUTE THE KISS OF DEATH IN THE EYES OF MANY VOTERS AND IS VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION BY MINH'S OPPONENTS; (B) SOME OBSERVERS SUGGEST THAT MINH WITH HIS REPUTED POPULARITY WOULD, IF ELECTED, BE A STRONGER BULWARK IN THE LONG RUN AGAINST COMMUNISM THAN THIEU.

7. WE ASSUME THE ENEMY DISCOUNTS SUCH POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

SECRET

PAGE 02 SAIGON 12592 02 OF 02 070627Z

IN RELATION TO THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES TO BE GAINED BY SUPPORTING MINH. PREVENTING THE CONSOLIDATION OF THIEU'S POWER THAT WOULD PROBABLY ENSUE FROM AN UNEQUIVOCAL ELECTION VICTORY UNDOUBTEDLY IS AN OBJECTIVE HIGH ON THE ENEMY'S LIST OF PRIORITIES. HOWEVER, EVEN IF THE COMMUNISTS DO NOT REALLY RATE MINH AS HAVING A CHANCE OF WINNING, THEY MIGHT SEE ADVANTAGE IN EXACERBATING NATIONAL DIVISIVENESS, DISCREDITING THE WHOLE ELECTION PROCESS AND HOPEFULLY DEPRIVING THIEU OF THE RESOUNDING AND CREDIBLE POPULAR MANDATE HE EVIDENTLY SEEKS FROM THE ELECTION.

8. THE ADVANTAGES TO BE GARNERED BY THE ENEMY SHOULD MINH ACTUALLY WIN WOULD INCLUDE, ONE ASSUMES, EXPLOITATION OF MINH'S SUPPOSED WEAKNESS AS A LEADER AND HIS PROFFESSED DEDICATION TO THE SEARCH FOR PEACE AS WELL AS OF THE STRAINS AND DISRUPTIONS IN THE COUNTRY ATTENDANT ON A CHANGE OF ADMINISTRATION. THEREFORE, FOR THE TIME BEING, THE ENEMY MAY SEE HIS INTERESTS SERVED BY EFFORTS TO PRODUCE AS LARGE A PRO-MINH VOTE AS POSSIBLE, WHATEVER THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTION. HE HAS MEANWHILE NOT PRECLUDED A SHIFT TO DIFFERENT TACTICS IF THAT SHOULD LATER APPEAR MORE PROFITABLE. BUNKER

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